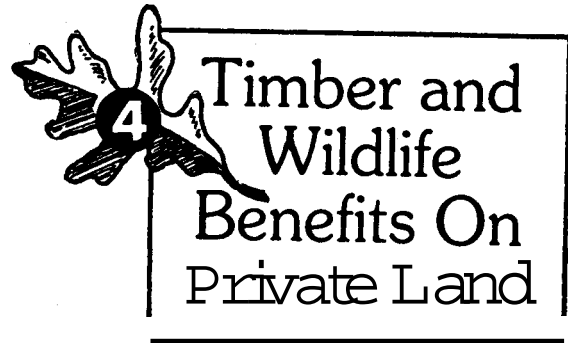


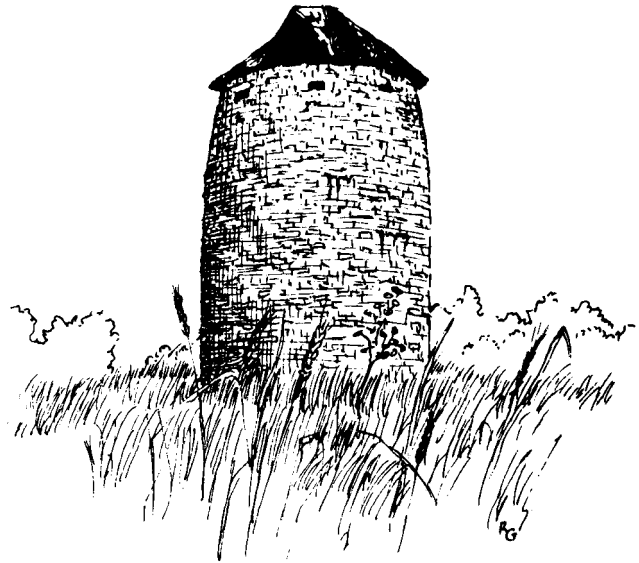
Farm Buildings and Wildlife



There's more to old farm buildings, especially barns than many of us realize. When we think about a barn and the animals that live there, our thoughts immediately picture cows, horses or other domestic livestock. We now realize that barns are important to wild creatures as well. They provide a unique habitat that attracts several different wildlife species.

Farm buildings were once much more common on the landscape. Unfortunately, the unique structures are a disappearing feature. Most structures were originally constructed for small family farming operations. As these operations become less common, giving way to absentee landowners and larger corporate farms, fewer barns are built, and those remaining are left to disrepair.

Old barns and other farm buildings, standing or collapsed, still can benefit wildlife. The vegetation surrounding these old mainstays of country commerce is usually a thick, rank tangle of weeds responding to the rich soil well fertilized by manure of long gone livestock. This vegetation provides cover and a food source for several wildlife species, especially rabbits, quail, pheasant (in pheasant range), turkeys, and songbirds.



Farm structures were once a much more common sight.

Many barns today are deteriorating rapidly.





Barn owls are one of Missouri's best known barn residents.

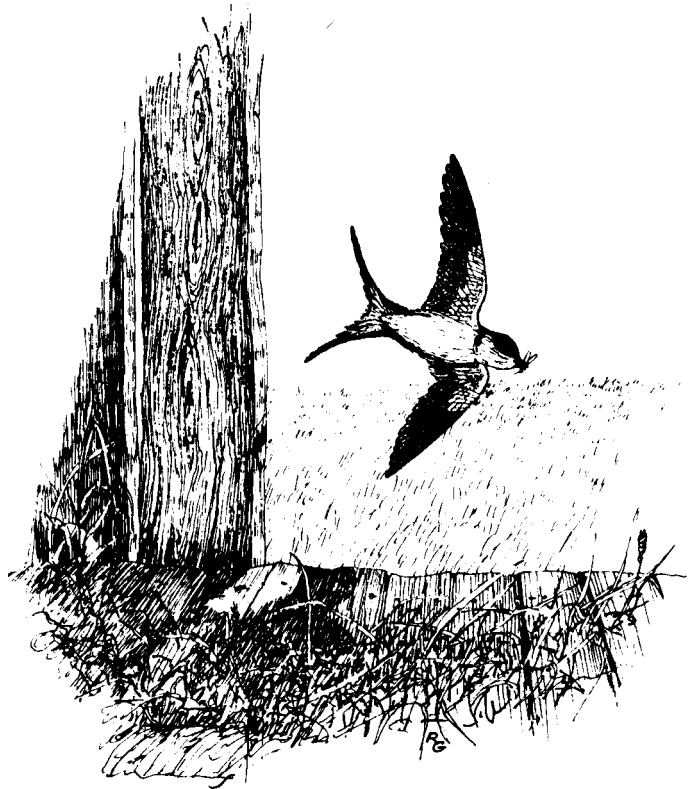
As far as Missouri is concerned, the most written about barn resident is the barn owl. The Missouri Department of Conservation has classified this nocturnal bird of prey as endangered, and is currently working to increase the bird's numbers and distribution in the state. The loss of suitable nesting habitat led to the bird's demise. In *The Barn Owl*, a book by D. S. Bunn, A. B. Warburton and R. D. S. Wilson, the authors agree that the "loss of nest sites is...the most important factor of all, for it is generally agreed that it is the replacement of old stone farm buildings by modern, prefabricated structures that has decimated the barn owl population in most counties."

The barn owl is the farmer's friend. It feeds extensively on mice. One scientist reported that a pair fed 758 mice to their young over 96 nights.

Barn owls aren't the only winged creatures that use farm buildings. Barn swallows, vultures, phoebes, and American kestrels use silos, barns and other abandoned buildings for roosting and nesting.

There are also many mammals that use barns and old buildings. Badgers, groundhogs, foxes and skunks tunnel under these structures to den. Raccoons are year-round users. They employ the inside of barns for refuge, weeping, and feeding. Two species of bats, the Big Brown Bat and Little Brown Bat, frequently use such buildings as nesting sites during the day periods of the year.

Barn swallows regularly nest in farm structures.



A variety of reptiles and one amphibian can often be found living in and around abandoned farm buildings. Lizards such as the northern fence lizard, five-lined skink and broadhead skink find shelter and food (insects) in these man-made shelters. Black rat snakes or "black snakes" are a common resident of old barns, corn cribs, or granaries. These harmless snakes are there to take advantage of the shelter available as well as the mice and nesting birds. Gray treefrogs are also commonly found in or on the sides of old buildings. These little amphibians enjoy resting in the cool nooks and crannies where the old wood and concrete meet along foundations.

Old structures are disappearing rapidly. Most are lost to decay and collapse. Many are destroyed to "tidy up" the site. Some are razed to salvage the materials for other purposes. The advent of prefabricated metal structures has made traditional barn structures obsolete, therefore, not many are built anymore. The existing structures are left to stand in disrepair, leaving their fate to the whims of the elements. Many Missourians have purchased old farms for summer retreats and find themselves with old farm structures like these. With no foreseeable uses for barns and outbuildings. Many are needlessly destroyed.

Barns have been in this country since the first Europeans settled here. They may be obsolete in today's agriculture, but they still have wildlife value. So, if you have one on your land and are interested in helping wildlife, let it stand.

